

Remarks of Mr. Jeffrey Feltman
United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs
UN General Assembly Special Session on the world drug problem
Round table 2: 'Drugs and crime'
New York, 20 April 2016

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

It is my honor to address you today on the theme of drugs and crime. As the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, I lead a department whose mandate is to help maintain international peace and security by assisting Member States, at their request, to prevent and resolve potentially violent disputes and conflicts peacefully.

Drug trafficking, and transnational organized crime, have significantly complicated our efforts to do so.

In the short time available, I'd like to share two reflections, as someone who has seen the connections between the drug trade and international peace and security, and the unintended consequences of drug policy on peace and security, and as a senior official with a front row seat to some of the big debates at the United Nations in recent years.

First, what strikes me is the importance of the link with the 2030 Agenda, and more specifically to the philosophy underpinning the Agenda. This landmark, universal agreement calls on us all to take a holistic and comprehensive approach to the most pressing problems facing humanity.

And yet, just over six months after its adoption, we seem to be perpetuating a siloed approach with one of our first test cases: the world drug problem.

Breaking out of our usual ways of working to tackle problems in a more integrated way – this is no easy task for anybody. I noted with satisfaction that progress was made in the Outcome Document, with the inclusion of references to human rights, women and youth, and development.

But if we were to be true to the 2030 Agenda’s philosophy, we would no longer be talking only about demand and supply reduction. Without question, these are essential issues that must be tackled. But they are not the only issues. Consistent with the 2030 Agenda, we also must focus on poverty, inequality, and violence reduction as principal goals of drug policy. And on promoting healthy lives, gender equality, decent employment, and safe cities. As the Deputy Secretary-General reminded us yesterday, the best prevention policy for drugs is the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Second, if our present global approach to drug policy has had *unintended* consequences, we can no longer reasonably claim that these are *unexpected*.

In some contexts, entire branches of government have been captured by narco-traffickers or, conversely, have gotten into the business of drugs. The drug economy generates billions upon billions of dollars annually, dwarfing our own counter-narcotics budgets as well as the budgets of many states. The illegal drug trade, together with the militarized response to it, are amongst the main drivers

of “epidemic levels” of homicidal violence in several countries. We have seen time and again the “balloon effect”, when an apparent counter-narcotic success story in one place only exports the problem to a neighbouring locality.

In addition to maintaining support for the narcotics conventions, we must urgently dedicate genuine effort to looking at new, humane approaches for minimizing these unintended consequences, which inflict incalculable harms on states, societies and communities. This could lead us to question assumptions that we hold dear, some of them dating back to or preceding the inception of the existing framework for tackling drugs. We could end up questioning the very end state we are currently aiming for: is it a society free of drugs – if that is possible – or a society where the nefarious consequences of drug use and the unintended consequences of our drug policies are both minimized? Evidence-based policy making means that we should not be afraid, as the Secretary-General said, to “consider all options”.

And so I close by urging you, as Member States, each and every one impacted by the world drug problem, to not step back from the historic 2030 Agenda as the guiding framework it is intended to be.

Let us not allow our preconceptions and fears to prevent us from looking at policy options with an open mind, with the health and well-being, as well as the peace and security of all humankind as our overarching imperative.

And let us use the remaining time to the ten year review of the Political Declaration and Plan of Action in 2019, to continue discussions in an open, transparent, inclusive and evidence-based way.

Thank you.